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News Release



<http://www.fws.gov/carlsbad>

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SERVICE PROPOSES CRITICAL HABITAT FOR TWO CALIFORNIA PLANTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to designate approximately 3,553 acres of critical habitat for two federally endangered plants – the San Bernardino bluegrass (*Poa atropurpurea*) and California taraxacum (*Taraxacum californicum*). The areas proposed for critical habitat are located in portions of the San Bernardino, Laguna and Palomar Mountains.

Of the 3,553 total acres being proposed for critical habitat, 1,389 acres are occupied by both the San Bernardino bluegrass and California taraxacum. An additional 1,624 acres is proposed for San Bernardino bluegrass and 540 acres for California taraxacum.

Critical habitat is a term used in the Endangered Species Act to identify geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations or protection.

Almost all the lands (2,712 acres) proposed as critical habitat for the San Bernardino bluegrass and the California taraxacum are federally managed by the U.S. Forest Service. Approximately 98 acres of the proposed critical habitat are state owned, and 743 acres are privately owned.

These plants are found in seasonally wet, mountain meadows ranging in elevations between 6,000 to 9,000 feet and grow in soils that retain water and drain slowly. The meadows are treeless, while the perimeters generally contain habitat dominated by sagebrush or pine forest.

San Bernardino bluegrass is a tufted perennial that produces erect, dense, spike-like flowers from early May to June and grows 8 to 10 inches high. It is found in meadows within the Big Bear region of the San Bernardino Mountains, as well as meadows in the Laguna and Palomar Mountains.

California taraxacum is a thick-rooted perennial herb in the sunflower family and only found in meadows within the Big Bear region of the San Bernardino Mountains. The plant has light green leaves 2 to 8 inches high and produces pale, yellow flowers from May to August.

This proposed rule was prepared in accordance with a settlement agreement stemming from a lawsuit filed against the Service in September 2004 by the Center for Biological Diversity and

the California Native Plant Society. The lawsuit challenged the Service's original finding that it was not prudent to designate critical habitat when both species were first protected under the ESA in 1998.

Comments and information on the proposed rule may be submitted in writing to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, 6010 Hidden Valley Road, Carlsbad, CA, 92011, electronically to fw8cfwcomments@fws.gov, or by facsimile to 760-431-9624. Comments will be accepted until October 9, 2007. Written requests for a public hearing on this proposed rule will be accepted until September 21, 2007.

A copy of the proposed rule and other information about San Bernardino bluegrass and California taraxacum is available on the Internet at <http://www.fws.gov/Carlsbad>.

The Service is preparing a draft economic analysis of the proposed critical habitat that will be made available for public review and comment at a later date.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. Federal agencies that undertake, fund or permit activities that may affect critical habitat are required to consult with the Service to ensure such actions do not adversely modify or destroy designated critical habitat.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 97-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 548 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American Tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to State fish and wildlife agencies.

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